

*On Genesis xi. 1-9 as a Poetic Fragment.**By J. Cheston Morris, M.D**(Read before the American Philosophical Society, December 4, 1896.)*

It was with great interest and pleasure that I listened to Dr. Hilprecht's account of his explorations and discoveries recently at Nippur, and to his lucid statement of his views as to the Sumerian and Accadian races and their civilization, and of what he has learned of their history. Especially I regard as important what he had to say of "the land of Shinar" or Sungir. On March 6, 1891, I communicated to the Society some notes on Hebrew Phonetics, accompanied with a transliteration in accordance with them of Genesis x, rendering "Shinar" by "Xnor," v. 10—and am still disposed to adhere to the clue which I think may thus be found to the further elucidation of the history and possibly of the migrations of the ancient peoples. When we read of the building of Babel in the land of Shinar (Genesis xi) by a people that "had bricks for stones and slime (bitumen) had they for mortar," we may well think of a race inhabiting an extensive plain or prairie such as that lying between the Euphrates and Tigris, and building in a different manner from that familiar to the collator of the account, who was probably of a different race—perhaps one of the Semites. His religion too was different, for he speaks of a conference among the gods whom he worshipped, ending with "let us go down and overthrow the tower." A little examination of this account will, I think, show that it is in the form of a Hebrew poem, as is also that of the creation in Genesis i. If so, this account may be that of a victory by a Semite race ascribed to the act of their protecting deity, and the subjugation and dispersion of these lowland people.* Did they, or some of them, migrate to Egypt and found an empire there—building with bricks as they had done in Shinar? Were they the people whose remains were recently described at a meeting of this Society by Mrs. Stevenson as having been discovered by Prof. Petrie? And eventually having been driven thence by the Hamites whom they had temporarily displaced, did they again migrate to the southwest and inhabit the country which to-day we call Senaar? In the Septuagint this is the transliteration given of שֵׁנַר. Nor is this inconsistent with the softening which must occur in peoples of other races of the guttural-nasal vowel ngain.

I may remark that in the cabinet of the Society are four wooden locks made by the negroes of St. Domingo a hundred years ago. On showing these some time ago to Dr. Hilprecht he remarked to me, "Why those are just such as every Arab sheik has to-day on his treasure-chest or on the door of his house in the valley of the Euphrates." I had no

* For migrations of the brick-builders see McCausland's *Builders of Babel*, London, 1871.

doubt then, that the negroes had learned to make them from their Arab captors and masters in Central Africa and had brought the art with them to the West Indies. But may it not be that their ancestors had brought the art with them from the plains of Babylonia, having migrated thence ages ago, as I have surmised above? If so we ought to be able to trace among the industries, languages and traditions of Central Africa some remnants of this early civilization in the plain of Babylon.

I translate from the Septuagint version of Gen. xi. 1-9 as follows :

And all the earth was (of) one lip,
 And one utterance to all.
 And it happened, as they moved from the east,
 They found a plain in the land of Shinar.

And they dwelt there ;
 And a man said to his neighbor,
 Come, let us make bricks,
 And let us burn them with fire.

And the bricks were to them for stone,
 And the asphalt was to them for mortar.

And they said, Come let us build ourselves a city,
 And a tower whose top shall be to heaven ;
 And let us make ourselves a name,
 Before we be scattered on the face of all the earth

And Jehovah descended to see the city
 And the tower which the sons of men builded.
 And Jehovah said, Behold the race is one,
 And there is one lip to all ;
 And this have they begun to do,
 And now, nothing will fail them
 Whatever they may plan to do.

Come, and descending, let us confuse their tongue
 That they hear not each one the utterance of his neighbor.

And Jehovah scattered them thence over the face of all the earth,
 And they ceased building the city and the tower.
 Therefore its name was called Confusion,
 Because there Jehovah confused the lips of all the earth,
 And thence Jehovah scattered them
 On the face of all the earth.